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Infest

THE ARCHES
GLASGOW, UK

The fertile noise scene on Instal's own doorstep has made this offshoot festival a welcome addition. 11 acts are on show in two late night slots following the main Instal festival, and added a speakeasy frisson to proceedings. Positioning them in The Arches public bar, awash with pop-eyed clubbers, makes for an at times uneasily tense mix.

The abysmal sound on the first night doesn't help matters, though neither does opening with the scratchy phutterings of Edinburgh duo Usurper, whose barely audible exercise with 'disabled' instruments are pretty much lost to the babble. There's no danger of that with Jazzfinger's martial slabs of sound, and any subtleties inherent in the primitive analogue wail of female duo Hockyfrilla (it's Swedish for mullet) are stamped over by their collaboration with Muscletusk's relentlessly pounding sludge.

Squeezed into 20 minute slots, there's an ad hoc urgency to such collaborations, and

pairing Wounded Knee's vocal loops with Noma's overriding drone, and Shareholder's abrasive clang with Nimrod 33, there's a sense that everybody has to have a turn. The brilliantly monikered Kylie Minoise closed the night with a short sharp shock of slobbering one-man aural hara-kiri and gonzo pantomime nihilism.

The sound improves considerably for night two, opened with an Industrial Dr Phibes organ vibe in a collaboration between Birds Of Delay and Nackt Insecten. Brighton female trio Polly Shang Kuan Band's sonic mouth music plugs into similar territory pursued by Double Leopards, and Ben Reynolds's solo guitar shimmers with a shy cheek. Any reticence displayed, however, looks like rock star posturing compared to brother-sister duo Red Kites, whose gossamer-thin folk whine finds them facing away from the audience. To close, Opaque's normally solo guitar FX is expanded to a tooled-up quintet of masked bandits for a brief, unpunctuated burst that defines Infest as a slow pincer movement towards Instal's centre.

NEIL COOPER



Kylie Minoise

Sightsonic: Touch 25

VARIOUS VENUES
YORK, UK

Since itself out less as a record label than as a multimedia publisher, Touch has evolved from its early releases – cassette compilations with Jon Wozencroft's meticulously designed magazines – to today's roster of electronic heavyweights, including Christian Fennesz and Biosphere. Its 25th birthday this year was marked by a range of events, one of which provided the bulk of the programme for Sightsonic, York's annual festival of digital arts. The existence of an event such as Sightsonic itself signals how much has changed since the days when each Touch cassette was a potent container of the new and unknown, boasting a nascent New Order, a pre-pomp Simple Minds, contributions from Gilbert & George and a series of samplers presenting then-unfamiliar music from countries such as Egypt and Indonesia.

The most immediately noticeable difference between early 1980s Touch and today's version is the move away from music, image and text unified by an explicit theme, to the more subtle use of Touch co-founder (with Mike Harding) Jon Wozencroft's images and design to

suggest associations for Touch artists' largely lyricless output by way of album covers and live projections, while maintaining a coherent brand for Touch as a whole. Wozencroft's photos of crisp winter landscapes and lush pastoral scenes and his mastery of typefaces certainly give contemporary Touch releases a feel of impeccable, if slightly glacial good taste.

There were no such visual cues on hand for the opening set by Rosy Parlane, however, and none was needed. Touring the UK ahead of the release of his second Touch album, *Jessamine*, the New Zealander's laptop soundscapes evoked the natural beauty of his home without ever tipping over into field recordings. His set started with the hint of a breeze and an unhurried, organic bass pulse before gathering density and bearing down on the listener with the presence of a forest.

If Parlane's music suggested a refreshing, if humbling encounter with the great outdoors, that of Philip Jeck continues to be like rooting through a jumble sale run by the Grim Reaper. With two portable record players and all other samples coming from old singles and LPs, Jeck's vinyl relics were doomed to live out their grooves in a limbo of crackle and repetition, most not even as recognisable as

the worn-out jangle from The Byrds' "Mr Tambourine Man". Jeck deployed, but decayed and recast as sewer echoes, growling sounds or the last wheezy notes of a long forgotten Wild West theme. The accompanying projections of deserted gardens, graveyards and lanes underlined the transience of most of Jeck's source material.

Fennesz also seemed to be in nostalgic mood, dicing with rock cliché in his first number by way of some reverb-heavy guitar work reminiscent of Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here". His second piece saw guitar and electronics fusing more smoothly, running his fingers down the strings for a ringing, spacey effect and offering an alternative vision of decay to Jeck's. Fennesz, Jeck and Parlane came together at the night's end for an improvised collaboration, which started cautiously but soon grew to trouser-shaking frequencies.

A strong constitution was needed for Ryoji Ikeda's set the following evening at the National Centre for Early Music, a former church. In an almost pitch black venue, Ikeda's discomforting high frequencies, rhythms with the brittle sputter of reactive metals and space-distorting speaker lurches could be

enjoyed at maximum intensity. Afterwards, Biosphere's set also explored spatial disorientation, evoking high-altitude dizziness with recordings of restless, ghostly bell samples and the terrifying roar of Himalayan weather made during Geir Jenssen's expedition to the mountain Cho Oyu, suggesting that even the places perceived to be the most isolated and tranquil have considerable sonic presence.

The Touch 25 conference took place earlier in the day: a relaxed event where Fennesz, Jeck, mastering expert Denis Blackham and Touch Web designer Philip Marshall answered questions, and Wozencroft delivered a 'sound seminar'. BJ Nilsen played a lunchtime gig, his minimal washes of sound evoking a fragile kind of solitude. Although insightful, the sessions raised more questions than they answered, with issues such as the survival of 'the album' in the download age and the effect of such a culture on listener expectations left open. Wozencroft suggested that Touch are trying to "work against the shuffle mode" and "surmount what's being done to us technologically"; with this, it will be fascinating to see how they face the next 25 years.

ABI BLISS



Philip Jeck, Rosy Parlane, Fennesz



Fennesz